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STRANGE MEETINGS

I

If one beheld a clod of earth arise,
  And walk about, and breathe, and speak, and love,
How one would tremble, and in what surprise
  Gasp: "Can *you* move?"

So, when I see men walk, I always feel:
  Earth! How have you done this? What can you be?
I'm so bewildered that I can't conceal
  My incredulity.

II

The dark space underneath is full of bones,
The surface full of bodies—roving men,
And moving above the surface a foam of eyes:
Over that is Heaven. All the gods
Walk with cool feet. They paddle among the eyes;
They scatter them like foam-flakes on the wind
Over the human world.

III

You live there; I live here:
Other people everywhere
Haunt their houses, and endure
Days and deeds and furniture,

Circumstances, families,
And the stare of foreign eyes.

IV

Often we must entertain,
Tolerantly if we can,
Ancestors returned again
Trying to be modern man.
Gates of memory are wide;
All of them can shuffle in,
Join the family; and, once inside,
Oh, what an interference they begin!
Creatures of another time and mood,
And yet they dare to wrangle and dictate,
Bawl their experience into brain and blood,
And claim to be identified with Fate.

V

Eyes float along the surface, trailing
  Obedient bodies, lagging feet.
The wind of words is always wailing
  Where eyes and voices part and meet.

VI

Oh, how reluctantly some people learn
  To hold their bones together, with what toil

Breathe and are moved, as though they would return,
  How gladly, and be crumbled into soil!

They knock their groping bodies on the stones,
  Blink at the light, and startle at all sound,
With their white lips learn only a few moans,
  Then go back underground.

VII—BIRTH

One night when I was in the House of Death
A shrill voice penetrated root and stone,
And the whole earth was shaken under ground:
I woke and there was light above my head.

Before I heard that shriek I had not known
The region of Above from Underneath,
Alternate light and dark, silence and sound,
Difference between the living and the dead.

VIII

It is difficult to tell
(Though we feel it well)
How the surface of the land
Budded into head and hand;
But it is a great surprise
How it blossomed into eyes.

IX

A flower is looking through the ground,
  Blinking in the April weather;
Now a child has seen the flower:
  Now they go and play together.

Now it seems the flower would speak,
  And would call the child its brother—
But—oh, strange forgetfulness!—
  They don't recognize each other.

X

How did you enter that body? Why are you here?
Your eyes had scarcely to appear
Over the brim—and you looked for me.
I am startled to find you. How suddenly
We were thrown to the surface, and arrived
Together in this unexpected place!
You, who seem eternal-lived;
You, known without a word.

XI

London is big, I know, is big:
  So is the bee-hive to the bee;
So is the dung-heap to the cockroach,
  And the flea-flesh to the flea.

London is great, is great, of course:
  So is the ocean to the pool;
So is the halter to the horse;
  So is folly to the fool.

XII

I often stood by my open gate
  Watching the passing crowd with no surprise;
I had not ever used my eyes for hate
  Till they met your eyes.

I don't believe this road was meant for you,
  Or, if it were,
I don't quite know what I am meant to do
  While your eyes stare.

XIII

Memory opens; memory closes.
Memory taught me to be a man.

It remembers everything:
It helps the little birds to sing.

It finds the honey for the bee:
It opens and closes, opens and closes.

Harold Monro